



Kind Colleagues

Month 2: Creating a Kind Workplace

Question of the Month

What does kindness mean in your workplace? When is it easy to be kind? When is it difficult?

Kind Colleagues Week 1

Metacognition: Committing to the practice of kindness means incorporating kindness into your everyday life and engaging in the awareness and skill-building that leads to kind actions. A powerful way to bring awareness to your kindness practice is through metacognition: the concept of thinking about our thinking. It's a practice of understanding our thought process in the moment and without judgment so that we can be prepared to respond with kindness. Learning to perceive our thoughts as something separate from ourselves helps us develop the self-awareness necessary "to examine and understand who we are relative to the world around us."¹ Reflecting on our learning process builds metacognition, and weekly reflection about our thinking reshapes our brain's structure, helping us become more adaptable, open-minded, and kind. "Adults whose metacognitive skills are well developed are better problem-solvers, decision makers and critical thinkers, are more able and more motivated to learn, and are more likely to regulate their emotions (even in difficult situations), handle complexity, and cope with conflict."² Increasing our self-awareness through metacognition can lead to kinder communication as we practice putting distance between our thoughts and our actions.

Kind Colleagues Week 2: Self-Kindness

Positive Affirmation Phrase: This month's self-kindness practice focuses on bringing calmness to challenging moments. Begin by coming up with a sentence or two to repeat to yourself when you're feeling stressed. The goal is to notice our thoughts and then learn to reframe our response to these thoughts. The statement may affirm your humanity ("I am a human, and just like everyone else, I make mistakes."), be a positive reflection ("I appreciate my colleagues and they appreciate me."), or be a reminder to practice self-kindness ("May I treat myself with kindness while I'm going through this experience."). Write down the phrase and repeat it often.³ Timely acts of self-affirmation during challenging moments, even if small, activate the reward centers of the brain and serve as motivation to maintain healthy practices and build confidence for navigating future difficulties.^{4,5}



Kind Colleagues Week 3: Kindness in Action: Everyday Practices

Be Kind Challenge: A great way to document acts of kindness in your workplace is to join the Be Kind Challenge! It can be done from anywhere and is a motivator that helps us do kindness even better. Join the many groups who are recording acts of kindness and posting visual reminders of kind acts in workplaces, schools, community centers, and more. The Be Kind Challenge raises awareness in your workplace and motivates departments and staff members to recognize acts of kindness on a regular basis.

Set an intention at your organization to notice and document kind acts throughout the year, and help spread kindness throughout your workplace. Present the challenge to all staff members, either in one large meeting or individual team meetings. Have fun with it and come up with creative ways to display your kindness chains wherever your location.

Kind Colleagues Week 4: Kindness in Action: Everyday Practices

Belonging: Consider all employees (and any volunteers, interns, clients, and customers) who may need extra connection. Reasons may include being new to the organization, dealing with stressful life situations, or living with disabilities that make connecting more difficult. Make it a point to regularly connect with these individuals. Even simple connections, such as greeting people by name, can be very powerful as our universal need to belong affects our performance in the workplace. In fact, research suggests that "the organizational culture of the workplace is involved in both determining and fostering a sense of not belonging at work, and as such organizations have a role to play in fostering a sense of belonging at work and enhancing employee well-being."⁶ Consider the frequency, inclusiveness, and accessibility of team-building opportunities to ensure that everyone in your community feels a sense of belonging.

Additional Activities

Kind Leadership: Create A “Be Kind” Code

An important part of building a kind culture is establishing organizational values that “give meaning to people’s lives and their work, that allow each person to experience their work with passion, commitment, dignity, and respect.”⁷ Clear expectations can support an environment in which kindness can thrive. When you work together to articulate the key principles that guide your organization, you invite your staff to contribute to the creation of your organizational culture and atmosphere, which builds emotional investment. Your “be kind” Code will help foster kind communication, encourage new ideas, promote effective collaboration, and create the kind of workplace culture that draws new talent to your organization. Consider the time you spend creating your “be kind” Code a wise investment. See “Creating Your ‘be kind’ Code” for a step-by-step guide to the process.

Kindness at Home

Suggest that staff build their home kindness practice by creating and displaying visual reminders of kindness at home. Like the power of a mural in a community space, a visual reminder of our kindness practice can help us engage and retain focus, and serve as a daily reminder that kindness skill-building takes practice. It can also set the tone that yours is a kind place and that kindness is a shared value in your space. Many studies support the power of visuals; psychology professor Haig Kouyoumdjian writes that visual cues are tangible and beneficial tools that foster successful learning, which “can help make abstract and difficult concepts more tangible and welcoming, as well as make learning more effective and long lasting.”⁸ Visual representations serve as reminders of one’s kind community and thereby inspire kind behavior. Try using the Ben’s Bells “Be Kind” flower or other imagery in any format that you would like.

Check out our Power of Visual Reminders of Kindness guide for more ideas, info on the science and benefits of kindness, and much more!



Clear expectations can support an environment where kindness can thrive. Scientists used to think that kindness was just a part of your personality you had it or you didn't have it. But recent research reinforces that kindness requires skills that can be learned and practiced. A commitment to kindness and a cohesive statement around its implementation can help inform action-oriented goals that will communicate the importance of kindness to positively impact your workplace while also helping create opportunities for connection between colleagues.

Methodology

This process can be used to develop your "be kind" Code. The process may be completed in one day or stretched over a week or two. The point is to dedicate time to exploring these ideas as a staff so that the resulting "be kind" Code will be meaningful for everyone involved.

Ground Rules

- Everyone participates
- All ideas are valid
- Everything is written on a sticky note (one idea per note) or board
- Listen, ask, and be curious

Imagining a Kind Place

1. Ask the group the following question and write responses on sticky notes-one response per note-and stick them on the board:
"Imagine that six months have passed and your workplace has been making progress exactly as you hoped to become the most successful and kindest workplace you could dream up. What has made your ideal work environment so successful and kind?"
2. Continue brainstorming for as long as the group is engaged and contributing.
3. Ask the group if they see any ideas that could be clustered together (common themes, etc.). Move the sticky notes so (V) that ideas that have something in common are gathered in clusters.
4. Ask the group to come up with a name or title for each of the clusters.



References

1. Price-Mitchell, M. (2015, Apr 7). *Metacognition: Nurturing Self-Awareness in the Classroom*. Edutopia. <https://www.edutopia.org/blog/8-pathways-metacognition-in-classroom-marilyn-price-mitchell>.
2. Dawson, T.L. (2008, Aug 23) *Metacognition and learning in adulthood*. Prepared in response to tasking from ODN/CHCO/IC Leadership Development Office.
3. Hayes, S.C., Strosahl, K.D., & Wilson, K.G. (2012). *Acceptance and commitment therapy: The process and practice of mindful change* (2nd ed.). Guilford Press.
4. Christopher N. Cascio, C.N. et al. (2016). "Self-affirmation activates brain systems associated with self-related processing and reward and is reinforced by future orientation." *Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience*, Volume 11, Issue 4, <https://doi.org/10.1093/scan/nsv136>
5. Cohen, G.L. & Sherman, D.K. (2014). "The Psychology of Change: Self-Affirmation and Social Psychological Intervention." *Annual Review of Psychology* Vol. 65:333-371. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-psych-010213-115137>.
6. Waller, L. (2020). *Fostering a Sense of Belonging in the Workplace: Enhancing Well-Being and a Positive and Coherent Sense of Self*. *The Palgrave Handbook of Workplace Well-Being*. In Dhiman, S.K. (Ed.), *The Palgrave Handbook of Workplace Well-Being*. Springer International Publishing.
7. Guillemin, M. & Nicholas, R. (2022). "Core Values at Work—Essential Elements of a Healthy Workplace." *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19, no. 19: 12505 <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph191912505>
8. Kouyoumdjian, K. (2012, Jul 20). *Learning Through Visuals: Visual imagery in the classroom*. *Psychology Today*. Retrieved from <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/get-psyched/201207/learning-through-visuals>.